DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 149 463 EA 010 280

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TITLE State Government, State Education Agencies and Private Schools.
PUB DATE 30 Nov 77
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Private Schools and the States, sponsored jointly by the United States Office of Education and the Council for American Private Education (Washington, D.C., November 29-30, 1977); For a related document, see EA 010 279

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; *Government School Relationship; *Private Schools; School Role; State Departments of Education; *State Government
IDENTIFIERS Educational Commission of the States

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a number of issues involving the relationship between private schools and state government. In particular, the author focuses in turn on 1) the role of private schools in American education, 2) the relationship that should exist among state governments, state education agencies, and private schools, 3) current discrepancies between the actual and ideal relationships among state governments, state education agencies, and private schools, and 4) steps that can be taken respectively by state governments, state education agencies, private schools, and the Education Commission of the States to improve relationships between private schools and state government. (JG)

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STATE GOVERNMENT, STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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In Bob Lamborn's invitation for this occasion, he spelled out a half-dozen questions he wanted me to address. Boiled down, they can be stated as follows:

(1) What is the role of private schools in American education?

(2) What relationship do I believe should exist between state governments, state education agencies and private schools?

(3) Where do I think we are, in comparison with this "ideal" view?

(4) What do I think should be done to improve the situation by

--state governments

--state education agencies

--private schools

--ECS

That's about as comprehensive a charge as I'm apt to get for some time, not just limiting me to what ECS ought to be doing, but laying out the scenario for all the other players. I'm pleased to do this, however inadequate my responses.

(1) What is the role of private schools in American education?

My answer is tempered by where I have been, more than by any definition provided by Webster or any authority. It has been my good fortune to have been in a series of positions where I had responsibility for planning for education, making recommendations intended to provide maximum opportunity for a state's citizens and a maximum return on the investment being made. I concluded long ago, that private schools are an appropriate and valuable part of American education and that they make substantial contributions to it.

A democratic society permits and encourages diversity. Individuals vary widely in their backgrounds, their needs, their interests and their capabilities and a spectrum of opportunity must be available to them. Private schools have been organized and supported essentially by those who cared deeply about values--be they academic, cultural, or religious--and who believed that those values could best be sustained and inculcated in

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a particular setting. Dedication to this belief has provided our country with a great resource that could not have been provided in any other way.

We live in a time when the uniqueness and contribution of the private school is recognized, increasingly, by our courts and by those who make the legislative and operational decisions that undergird and direct the total educational enterprise. It is my belief that the future role of private schools will be the same, primarily, as at present--but that that role will be strengthened by additional public support.

(2)(3) What relationship do I believe should exist between state governments, state education agencies and private schools, and where do I think we are, in comparison with this "ideal" view?

In combining the next two Lamborn "imperatives," I come up with the question: Ideally, what relationship should exist between state government, state education agencies, and private schools--and how close are we to the ideal? I am certain that a four-foot shelf could be written about this but my comments will be brief.

In an "ideal" arrangement, the private schools would have defined their role and scope as complementary to (rather than in opposition to or competitive with) the public schools, identified the basis for their uniqueness and their areas of strength, provided evidence of commitment to excellence, made their resources known, indicated to whom those resources would be available and utilized spokesmen who--in supporting their own needs--supported the needs of the total educational enterprise.

State education agencies, in an "ideal" arrangement, would be concerned about the education needs of <u>all</u> the citizenry, not just parts of it, encouraging excellence, making recommendations to promote access for special populations, pressing for appropriate support patterns, protecting consumers from unqualified practitioners, searching continuously for alternate approaches, and maintaining a full dialogue with the public.

State government (which, by the way, includes state education agencies) will be interpreted, in this instance, to mean the Governor and the Legislature. In an "ideal" relationship, the men and women who hold these positions of leadership would be aware of (and continuously involved in assessing) the state's need for social services, demanding the identification and development of new approaches for meeting those needs, fully informed as to the potential consequences of actions before taking them, willing to support that which evidenced value and determined not to take "non-negotiable" positions.

If those sound like an adaptation of the Boy Scout oath, I apologize. If they sound <u>related to each other</u>, I intended them to be. Cutting across them is a clear recommendation for openness, keeping everything on top of the table, being willing to consider new approaches, not acting without all the facts and being responsible. The men and women in these three enterprises cannot be relieved of their obligation to provide leadership in a time when it is so badly needed.

How close are we to the ideal? Hopefully, as in the game we played as children, we are getting "warmer"--not "hot" by any means, but "warmer."

What is the evidence?

I find people in the private and public schools more willing to work together, to share what they have. I see Governors and Legislatures looking for ways to provide whatever assistance their state's constitution will permit them to provide to private schools. The courts have searched for broad and helpful interpretations of the law. Editorial positions are re-examined.

(4) What should be done?

Let me begin with the easiest activity to describe--in my own organization. ECS was formed, a dozen years ago, as a means of having states help each other, to bring political and educational leadership together to examine critical issues in education, to develop information for those who make decisions at the state level, to make recommendations and to develop policies.

For some reason, we have done much with respect to private higher education but very little with respect to private schools. This may be due, in part, to our determination to work with those issues reported to us by the states as having the greatest priority--and the matter of the states' relationship to private schools (although being tested in a number of states) unlike the name of Abou Ben Adhem, did not (and does not) head the list. That does not mean that it is unimportant; it may be familiar, or other things may have been "hurting more" when the reports were made.

ECS has seven Commissioners from each of its member states (46 states plus two territories). They are: the Governor, two legislators, and four other individuals who are apt to be either "in" education or "associated with it." We also have non-voting commissioners from the educational associations and the federal government. Bob Lamborn is one of these. He is active. He attends our meetings and participates. He has met with our key staff. He is raising our awareness and providing information we have not previously had. He is an excellent and articulate spokesman for the private schools.

ECS will, as a result of Bob's initiative,

--provide CAPE with all of our studies and publications;

--secure nominations of private school representatives to serve on ECS Task Forces;

--seek private school input in the selection of priority issues;

--request CAPE input in arriving at policy positions;

--develop information concerning private schools for use by state leaders.

ECS does not appoint its own Commissioners. As I indicated, this is a responsibility of the Governor and legislative leaders in your state. If you wish to be one of the seven (or of the four, if you are not a Governor or legislator!) you should make your interest known to the appointing authority in your state.

What would I have the private schools do?

Primarily, initiate activities that will put to rest some of the myths that haunt your operation. These are myths, and there is abundant evidence to offset them, but a surprising number of people still credit them. What are they? These will illustrate:

(a) Private schools are for the rich;

(b) The parochial schools teach nothing but religion;

(c) All private schools are alike;

(d) All private schools have very small classes;

(e) Private schools are "white enclaves" for those who do not wish to have their children associate with members of minority groups.

I would urge your organizations and your institutions to make certain that state officials have adequate and correct information about these matters. Your record is an excellent one and should not be diminished by "myths."

Further, I would have your spokesmen, in seeking understanding of and support for the private schools, be aware of, and committed to the meeting of, a state's total educational need. Those who do not wish to support improvement are strengthened by any indication of divisiveness--"We can dismiss them because they are obviously only interested in one thing."

It is clear that private and public schools have a number of similar objectives, plans, problems, and resources and that they should and will work more closely together in each succeeding year. Each has children who can be helped by resources held by the other. Children will continue to flow back and forth between the two. Both contribute to meeting that "total societal need."

I would urge State Departments of Education to include private schools, first and foremost, in their planning activities. If a task is to be performed, let all who will help perform it sit at the table as equals. There should be no "surprises" with respect to what will be done and who will do it.

I would further urge State Departments to have, on their staffs, a greater number of individuals whose experience, expertise and assignment is related to private schools.

Also, I would suggest a determined effort to have information available, in every region of the state, which will assist families in

identifying the resources and choices available to them--in all kinds of schools. There are families with handicapped children who will want to know where the resources exist to help their child, or families with gifted children, or families who need to ascertain what assistance is available for services they cannot afford.

In describing the "ideal situation," I have indicated the kind of responsiveness and insistence I would suggest for elected leaders. We live in a time when problems are apt to be addressed by legislation and I ask that those who legislate (and the Governor who approves) know all there is to know about a problem before they write (or sign) legislative acts; that they have heard from all who are involved, tested the potential consequences, determined the legal implications, and assessed the cost--both of taking, and not taking, the action.

Our country is a better place because of the contributions of our private schools. It is critically important that those contributions not be lost. Because education is a state function (not federal), it is apparent that the primary actions which must be taken to ensure the full utilization of private schools, resources will be taken at the state level. I am impressed by the concern that is being expressed, the actions being taken and the widespread desire, on the part of the leaders in the private and public sectors, to cooperate rather than compete. We are, indeed, getting "warmer" in our search for positive and productive relationships.